

A dramatic sky with a rainbow and a dark mountain silhouette. The sky is a mix of blue and green, with a bright rainbow arching across it. The bottom of the image shows a dark silhouette of a mountain range.

# Talking With God

*The Radioactive Ark Of The Testimony*

Communication Through It  
Protection From It

**Roger D. Isaacs**

*Praise for*  
**Talking With God**

“An enormous, imaginative work. I think I would call it a modern midrash. And as you know, midrash can be both stimulating and far-out.”

*The Late Rabbi Jacob Milgrom, Biblical Scholar*  
*U. C. Berkeley Professor Emeritus of Near Eastern Studies*

“At first blush, the thesis of the book seems bizarre and too fantastic to be credible. It also represents a potential threat to how biblically-based western religions have read the text for centuries. However, the massive textual material Isaacs adduces, the painstaking philological examination of terms in ancient Hebrew and other relevant ancient languages, and the line of careful argument and presentation build a strong case for the possible validity of his interpretive enterprise. The case [Isaacs] makes for the reinterpretation of pivotal biblical terms and for interpreting biblical texts from the perspective of the physical sciences, especially physics and chemistry, builds as the narrative progresses, leading the reader to take seriously what initially seems to be an outlandish reading of the biblical text. This work, therefore, represents a novel and substantive approach to biblical study and understanding.”

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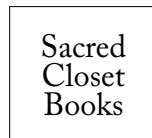
*The Radioactive Ark Of The Testimony*

Communication Through It  
Protection From It

*An Etymological Study*

**Roger D. Isaacs**

Edited by  
Janice Williams Miller



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# Contents

|  |      |
|--|------|
| Acknowledgements .....   | ix   |
| List of Charts .....   | xi   |
| List of Pictures and Illustrations .....                       | xi   |
| Abbreviations .....  | xiii |
| Dating .....   | xiv  |
| Hebrew Chronology .....  | xv   |
| <br>   |      |
| Introduction: Read This First! .....                           | xvii |
| <br>   |      |
| Chapter 1: Learning to Communicate .....                       | 1    |
| Chapter 2: Puzzling Laws .....                                 | 7    |
| Chapter 3: Holy isn't Holy .....                               | 13   |
| Chapter 4: Tables of Stone .....                               | 25   |
| Chapter 5: Communication Station .....                         | 31   |
| Chapter 6: Walkie Talkie .....                                 | 57   |
| Chapter 7: Danger, Danger! .....                               | 83   |
| Chapter 8: Radioactive Fallout .....                           | 111  |
| Chapter 9: Priestly Protections .....                          | 133  |
| Chapter 10: Congregation Covers .....                          | 203  |
| Chapter 11: <i>Par</i> for the Course .....                    | 275  |
| Chapter 12: What is God? .....                                 | 299  |
| <br>   |      |
| Appendix A: <i>Edut</i> in the Following Books .....           | 311  |
| Appendix B: Does <i>B'rith</i> Really Belong in Numbers? ..... | 319  |
| Appendix C: Documentary Hypothesis ABCs .....                  | 325  |
| Appendix D: <i>Kawbade</i> .....                               | 329  |
| Appendix E: The Phinehas Story .....                           | 349  |
| Appendix F: <i>Yom Kippur</i> .....                            | 353  |
| Appendix G: Impurity .....                                     | 387  |
| Appendix H: Holiness (H) Code .....                            | 405  |
| <br>   |      |
| Glossary .....   | 411  |
| Bibliography .....   | 415  |
| Notes .....  | 423  |
| Language Index .....   | 489  |
| Index .....  | 503  |

“And I will meet with you there and will speak to you from above the ark cover, from between the two cherubim, which are on the ark of the testimony.” (Exodus 25:22)



## Chapter 2

# Puzzling Laws

It is easy to make two erroneous assumptions about Moses' descent from fiery Mount Sinai: (1) Moses was the first to receive God's laws. False. It's well known that the Israelites weren't the first to utilize sophisticated legal codes. (2) These laws were only moral or civil in nature. False. Some of them did address man's relation to man, but others were a formal codification of certain systems and phenomena that had been taken for granted by the first group of men God put on earth—Cain and Abel, Noah and the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. These men had at least a nodding acquaintance with these laws and the process of sacrifice that was central to them and to the thesis of this book. God was telling the Israelites through Moses that if they closely adhered to these laws and to the sacrificial process, their safety would be assured. If they didn't, they'd be flying in the face of nature itself, and you can't tamper with the laws of nature and expect to exist for very long. The people of that time had no idea what God was talking about, so they either obeyed because He told them to, or they disobeyed and took the consequences. They were like two-year-old children who are warned by Mother not to go near the flame. They don't know what the flame is, so they either obey because Mommy says so, or they disobey and get burned.

I don't know whether there was ever a group of people prior to the Israelites who really understood why they should follow these natural laws of God, but as far as I know, no group from Moses' time to the present has had any inkling of how or why they worked. It's no wonder. Take a look at most of the Leviticus 2–14 translations and you will find a strange wilderness of words and concepts. Many skip over them on their first reading of the Bible because they seem to have no earthly application to our complicated world of bombs, ROMS, and taxes. For example, take the admonitions to eat only clean animals that have a cloven hoof and chew their cud, to tear down your house if it has plague of leprosy, or to stay out of the sanctuary of the tent

a. Lev. 11:3; Lev. 14:44–45; Lev. 16:2

when the cloud is on the ark, lest you die.<sup>a</sup> These and many other related, puzzling regulations have been lumped together with the civil laws when, in fact, they constitute a separate set of natural laws having little or nothing to do with civil law. The problem is that language evolves, and over the years the Hebrew words pertaining to these natural laws have been translated according to modern perception rather than according to the original meaning of the observers' statements. This skew, along with the tendency to assign them moral relevance like the adjoining laws, has led to some strange and wondrous interpretations. It has also led modern day scholars to bury entire sections of biblical law in a grave of obsolescence.

Whether it's wise to consign portions of the Bible to legend and myth, only time will tell. However, if we are to do so, at least we should understand what we are discarding. The natural laws are a small part of the Covenant Code that Moses received from God on Mount Sinai and relayed to the Israelites probably sometime around the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century BCE. They tend to be quite boring unless suddenly you realize the tantalizing mystery of why they are there in the first place. Most of these natural laws, detailed in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, revolve around the words "clean" and "unclean" and the process of sacrifice.

### Clean and Unclean

When translating these natural law concepts from the Hebrew, the words "clean" and "unclean" are probably the most confusing of all the word choices. When used in a moral context, they immediately set up a characterization of good, bad, or evil, which opens the door to the concepts of wrongdoing, sin, and atonement. In a natural context, and quite apart from the traditional translation of "clean," Webster gives the following definition: "producing little or no radioactive fallout or contamination."<sup>1</sup> This is an example of modern terminology fitting the ancient scene. This is exactly the technical sense in which I'm using the word throughout this book. Many other

words in the Bible have technical meanings, which are relevant to my theory. Thus, my intense scrutiny.

The original meanings of the words “clean,” “unclean,” “sin,” and “atonement” have been mistranslated and misunderstood. This has caused problems from both religious and academic perspectives because certain meanings work within certain frames of reference and not in others. Take “unclean” for example. According to traditional translations, eating or touching an “unclean” animal makes me a “sinner,” but I can expiate that “sin” by taking a bath and washing my clothes in the evening.<sup>b</sup> Also, how can an animal be “unclean” when alive but “clean” when dead?<sup>c</sup> And something is definitely amiss when a mother must offer a sacrifice to “atone” for the “sin of uncleanness” caused by having a baby. Imagine using words like “sin” and “atone” in connection with giving birth to a child!<sup>d</sup> But that’s the way these terms are translated today in most versions of the Bible.

b. Lev. 5:2,5; 11:25

c. e.g., Lev. 11:6–8,24

d. Lev. 12:6,7

The dietary laws are all based on the concepts of clean and unclean. Certain animals were not to be eaten because they were considered unclean when dead. The rest fell into the category of clean and could be eaten without a problem. For the most part, instead of specifying which animals are prohibited, the Bible defines broad groupings with examples.<sup>e</sup>

e. Lev. 11:1–2

The first of four dietary categories permits eating any animal that has a split hoof and chews its cud. Then follow some examples of forbidden animals one might think fall into this category but which really do not. The camel does not, because while it chews its cud, it does not have a split hoof. The hare does not for the same reason. The pig, on the other hand, has a split hoof but does not chew its cud. No bacon with those eggs.

The second dietary stipulation prohibits eating sea animals that don’t have fins and scales. That cuts out lobster thermidor, shrimp cocktail, and turtle soup.

The third grouping involves birds, which were not so easily categorized. They are specified by name.

Finally, insects are categorized, the only edible kind being those that leap. Perhaps this means grasshoppers and the like,



but no one knows for sure, and, unlike the case of sizzling bacon, few seem to care.

Now these are the creatures and categories that the Israelites were repeatedly exhorted not to eat or touch when dead. Well, what happened if they did? Did they shrivel up and die? Were they tried in a court and sentenced to prison? No. This is what the Lord commanded:

<sup>24</sup>“And by these you will become unclean; whoever touches their carcass will be unclean until evening.

<sup>25</sup>“And whoever carries their carcass will wash his clothes, and he will be unclean until evening.” (Lev. 11:24–25)

It was true that a citizen who deliberately and repeatedly broke these rules would find himself in trouble with the authorities. However, the person who accidentally touched one of the proscribed animals had to carry out a simple antidote. That’s a little suspicious. Maybe by washing himself and his clothes he was getting rid of something that was on him, something that came off of the unclean animal.

The Lord continues:

<sup>32</sup>“And everything on which it falls, any of them [unclean animals], when they are dead, will be unclean; whether it be a vessel of wood, or a garment, or skin, or sack, any vessel in which work is done, will be brought into water, and it will be unclean until the evening, then it will be clean.

<sup>33</sup>“And every earthen vessel into which any of them fall, whatever is in it will be unclean and you will break it [the vessel].

<sup>34</sup>“All food therein which may be eaten, that on which water comes, will be unclean; and all drink that may be drunk in all [such] vessels will be unclean.

<sup>35</sup>“And everything on which [any] of their carcass falls will be unclean; an oven or a range for pots will be destroyed; they are unclean and unclean they will be to you.” (Lev. 11:32–35)

An interesting exception was in the case of a carcass of an unclean animal falling into a spring, “or a pit of a collection of water,” i.e., a cistern.<sup>f</sup> The water in the cistern did not become

f. Lev. 11:36

unclean, but anyone who took the carcass out was unclean. The flowing water of a fountain or a stream or rainwater feeding a cistern simply dissipated and was not affected.

If a carcass fell on sowing seed before it was sown, it was alright, but if water was put on the seed and a carcass fell on it, then it would be unclean. Something also happened to a clean animal that died by itself or was killed [torn] by wild beasts. It became unclean, and anyone who touched or ate it would wash his clothes and be unclean until evening. Then he was clean. In this case, there does not seem to be any objection to anyone other than the priests eating the animal as long as one followed the prescribed formula afterwards.<sup>g</sup> With these examples in mind, the question must be asked, what is the true meaning of the words “clean” and “unclean”? g. Lev. 17:15

### Laws of Sacrifice

The laws of sacrifice also raise questions as to their true meaning. It is easy to equate the purpose of the Hebrew sacrifices with that of the other ancient civilizations, i.e., to propitiate their gods. A careful study shows this just isn't correct.

Many chapters in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers are devoted to the laws of sacrifice. For example, chapters 13 and 14 of Leviticus are concerned with sacrifice as it pertained to the plague of leprosy and the priest's obligation to observe and quarantine sufferers outside the camp. The point here is that after the priest declared the person well, there were several sacrifices that had to be offered. Among these was a sin offering:

<sup>19</sup>“And the priest will make a sin offering, and will make atonement for him that is to be cleansed of his uncleanness ...

<sup>20</sup>“And the priest will offer the burnt offering on the altar; and the priest will make atonement for him and he will be clean.”  
(Lev. 14:19–20)

Once again the concepts of sin and atonement arise, this time in connection with the uncleanness brought about by disease.

The plague of leprosy could also affect clothing and houses, rendering them unclean. If it affected cloth, one either had to

wash it or cut off the affected portion, provided the plague didn't spread. If it spread, the material had to be completely burned. If the plague was in a house, then one removed the areas that were affected. If it spread, one had to tear down the whole house, being careful to take the unclean material to an unclean place outside the camp.<sup>h</sup> In those cases when the plague didn't spread, once the affected areas were washed or removed, the priest pronounced the house clean. However, it was still necessary for him to use the blood of a bird, among other items, to completely decontaminate the house. Included in this process (sacrifice) was a living bird, which afterward was let go "outside of the city into an open field; thus, he will make atonement for the house, and it will be clean."<sup>i</sup> In these cases and the case of the leper, sacrifice seemed to have the purpose of somehow mitigating or neutralizing plague. Now, following the generally accepted translation, an utterly impossible use of the word "atonement" pops up, unless one is to conclude that houses sin! There must be something wrong with using the English word "atone" in these cases.

h. Lev. 14:40

i. Lev. 14:53

So, one by one, the meanings of these words hit a wall. Many other words will experience the same fate as this book progresses.

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